HELLENISM IN THE EAST

The interaction of Greek and non-Greek civilizations from Syria to Central Asia after Alexander

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CHAPTER FIVE

The Problem of Hellenistic Syria*

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> And it came to pass after the victory of Alexander the son of Philip, the Macedonian, who came out from the land of Kittim and smote Darius, king of the Persians and Medes . . . and started many wars and conquered many fortified places and slew the kings of the earth . . . And his sons ruled, each in his own place, and after his death they all assumed diadems, and his sons (ruled) after him for many years and multiplied evils in the land (1 Maccabees 1.1–9).

The first book of Maccabees in its opening paragraph reflects an important aspect of the impact of hellenistic rule in Syria, the prevalence of conflict, war and instability. It does also, however, illustrate something quite different, the possibility of a communal historical consciousness and a national culture which might provide a framework within which a community in the Syrian region could have absorbed and reacted to the fact of Greek conquest. That this was true of the Jewish community of Jerusalem is beyond all question (Millar 1978). 1 Maccabees, written originally in Hebrew, directly continues the tradition of Old Testament historiography. It has indeed also been argued that Chronicles and the books of Ezra and Nehemiah were also written in the hellenistic period (Eissfeldt 1965, 529f). If that is dubious, the book of Ecclesiasticus (*Ben Sira*) was certainly written around 200 BC or soon after, and Daniel, in its final form, in the 160s (Schürer 1986, 198f; 245f).

The culture of Judaea and Jerusalem thus exhibits both a profound continuity with the pre-Greek past and an equally undeniable absorption of Greek elements (Hengel 1974). As is well known, the first attested use of the word *hellenismos* comes in 2 Maccabees (4.13), and refers to the enrolment of the Jerusalemites as 'Antiochians', the setting-up of a gymnasium and the wearing of Greek clothes.

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We can therefore use Maccabees to pose at least one of the many questions which can in principle be asked about hellenistic Syria. By 'hellenistic' in this sense I mean simply the period from Alexander to the mid-first century BC. By 'Syria' I mean anywhere west of the Euphrates and south of the Amanus Mountains – essentially therefore the area west of the Euphrates where Semitic languages were used: Aramaic in its various dialects, Phoenician, Hebrew, and earlier forms of Arabic. This begs a question about Asia Minor (and especially Cilicia), from which Aramaic documents are known, and a far more important one about northern Mesopotamia and about Babylonia. Should we not, that is, see the various Aramaic-speaking areas of the Fertile Crescent as representing a single culture, or at any rate closely connected cultures, and therefore not attempt to study the one area without the others?

The first question is one of cultural identity. Can we observe elsewhere in Syria, i.e. outside Judaea, either the continued survival of a non-Greek culture, or the fusion (*Verschmelzung*) in Droysen's sense of Greek and non-Greek cultures? As I have argued elsewhere, there is perhaps just enough evidence to show that this was the case in the Phoenician cities of the coast (Millar 1983). But elsewhere, with the exception of Judaea, we meet a problem which haunts one and all of the questions we would like to ask. If we are going to ask about the nature or limits of hellenisation, there is a prior question: the hellenisation of what? Whether we think of northern Syria, the Orontes valley, or Damascus, or present-day Jordan, we find that almost nothing is known, from either literary or documentary or archaeological evidence, about what these places were like in the Achaemenid period (the archaeological evidence is largely confined to individual domestic or decorative objects and weaponry (Moorey 1975; 1980); only the evidence from the Judaean area has been systematically assembled by Stern 1982). Our best evidence for the personal life, nomenclature and religious observances of non-Jewish Aramaic speakers in the Achaemenid period comes in fact from the private letters in Aramaic from Egypt (Milik 1967). The not very numerous monumental inscriptions in Aramaic from Syria (Donner, Röllig 1964–68, nos. 201–27; Abou Assaf, Bordreuil, Millard 1982) are no later than the seventh century BC. The only known cuneiform archive from Syria, found near Aleppo and dating to the Neo-Babylonian and early Achaemenid periods (Fales 1973), will serve to remind us of how much we do not know. The only cuneiform tablet of the Achaemenid period so far discovered in Jordan (Dalley 1984) is, however, more revealing. Written in Harran in the first year of a king named Darius, it records a sale by two people with Aramaic names to a person whose father has the Edomite/Idumaean name of Qusu-yada'. It was found at Tell Tawilan near Petra, and thus clearly reflects the type of move-

ment and interchange round the Fertile Crescent hinted at above. It is also significant that the same Idumaean name reappears on an Aramaic/Greek bilingual *ostrakon* of the third century BC (below p. 118). By contrast, formal inscriptions in Aramaic are rare (though note that of *Tobiah* from 'Araq el-Emir, Mazar 1957). Otherwise, it is only in Teima in north-west Arabia, on the southern borders of what would later be the Nabataean kingdom, that we can find Aramaic inscriptions, west of the Euphrates and south of the Amanus, in the Achaemenid period itself (Donner, Röllig 1964-1968 nos. 228–30; Winnett, Reed 1970; see Bawden et al. 1980; new texts in Livingstone et al. 1983). Aramaic *ostraka* of the Persian period are, however, known from a number of sites in Israel, e.g. Beer-Sheva (Naveh 1973), and from Arad (Naveh 1981). It can reasonably be expected that archaeological investigation in areas outside present-day Israel would produce more; and Aramaic material of the Persian period has, for instance, been discovered at Tell el Mazar in Jordan (Yassine 1983).

For the moment our evidence on Achaemenid Syria is very limited (see e.g. Rainey 1969), and what we know of its social and economic history is still largely dependent on passing allusions in classical sources, for instance Xenophon's account of his march across north Syria from Myriandrus, a Phoenician trading-post, through an area of villages, and one satrapal palace and associated *paradeisos*, to the city of Thapsacus on the Euphrates (*Anab.* 1.4.6–11). There were apparently no cities on the route which they took between the coast and the Euphrates at that moment. Did they deliberately avoid Aleppo, or had it declined as a city? Of the inland cities of the Syrian region which may still have been inhabited in the Persian period only Damascus is really certain. It was there that Parmenio captured the treasures of Darius (Q.C. 3.12.27; Arrian *Anab.* 2.11.9–10); and Strabo 16.2.20 (756) says that it was the chief city of Syria in the Persian period. Berossus also reports (*FGrHist.* 680 F 11) that Artaxerxes II (405/404–359/358 BC) set up images of Artemis Anaitis in various places, including Ecbatana, Babylon, Susa, Sardis and Damascus.

Our ignorance of Achaemenid Syria is a major problem also for any assessment of the economic consequences of the Macedonian conquest. From a 'Marxist' standpoint, for instance, the late Heinz Kreissig (1978) argued that the Seleucid empire continued to be based on the 'Asiatic mode of production', meaning the labour of peasants who were not slaves and owned their own means of production, but were dependent on those to whom they paid their surplus. Pierre Briant (1982b, 248), from a similar standpoint, once equated the 'Asiatic mode of production' with the 'royal economy' briefly sketched in the Aristotelian *Oeconomica* II. But if we look for specific and provable instances of dependent villages in Syria in the Achaemenid period, we will find precisely, and only, those in north Syria which Xenophon

states had been granted to Parysatis (*Anab.* 1.4.9). We need not dispute Briant's generalisation that the village was a predominant social formation throughout the Near and Middle East through both the Achaemenid and the hellenistic periods. But we do *not* know what was the typical set of existing economic relationships, into which the Macedonian conquest obtruded.

The fact of military conquest is indeed about all that is clear from the early hellenistic period. Beyond that we would want to ask, for instance, some of the following questions: (1) What new Greek cities were founded, when and where? (2) Were they accompanied by Greek or Macedonian settlement in the surrounding territories? (3) What substantial changes, if any, accompanied the acquisition of Greek *names* by existing cities? (4) Was there significant immigration and settlement by Greek speakers outside the context of city foundations? (5) Are we to think of a degree of social and cultural fusion between Greek settlers and the existing population, or rather, as Briant (1982b) has argued, of the Greeks forming separate enclaves? (6) Did the period see the introduction into Syria of what 'Marxists' define as the 'ancient mode of production', i.e. one based on a monetary economy, private property and the exploitation of slave labour? Any temptation to make sweeping generalisations in this topic should be tempered by the important evidence of the papyri from the Wadi Dâliyeh, north of Jericho (Cross 1969; see Lapp 1974). Though full publication of these documents is still awaited after nearly a quarter of a century, preliminary descriptions show that they date to the fourth century, before Alexander's conquest (one is firmly dated to 335 BC); they may well, as Cross suggests, have been deposited in the cave where they were found in the aftermath of the Samaritan rising of *c.* 332 BC. The papyrus of 335 BC records the sale of a slave for 35 pieces of silver. There were also a number of coins, imported and local (especially Tyrian), which also remain unpublished.

These documents are also potentially relevant to a final question, (7) What changes were brought about, outside the area of Greek settlement, in the culture of the inhabitants, e.g. in literacy? What combination of literacy was there in Semitic languages (Hebrew, Aramaic, Phoenician, and later Nabataean), in Greek, in both or in neither?

The only substantial area where it is beyond question that new city foundations transformed the map of the region is Syria, with Seleucus I's foundation of Antioch, Apamea, Seleucia and Laodicea, a process brilliantly described by Seyrig (1970b). Near Antioch there was said to have been briefly a city 'Antigoneia', founded by Antigonus Monophthalmus, and settled by Athenians (so Malalas, apparently following a chronographer named Pausanias, *FGrHist.* 854 F 10). At Laodicea there was similarly said to have been a village called 'Mazabda', and at Apamea one called 'Pharnace' (ibid. F 10, 9–10).

Excavations on this site have revealed one object from the Persian period, a fragment of an Attic pyxis (Balty 1977). What is significant is that it is *only*, so far as I have discovered to date, in the area of these cities that we find smaller settlements with Greek or Macedonian names. For instance, Diodotus Tryphon, who seized the Seleucid throne in the 140s, came from a *phrourion* called 'Cassiana' which, like others with the names 'Larissa', 'Megara', 'Apollonia' and so forth, belonged to Apamea, where Tryphon was educated (Strabo 16.2.10 (752)). Even so, there were also villages in the territory of Apamea with non-Greek names, like the *kômê Kaprozabadaiôn* which an inscription reveals (*IG* XIV 2558; photo in Balty 1971, 17; see *BE* 1960, 95). The word 'Kapro' reflects Kfar, meaning 'village', in Aramaic, as in Hebrew (see *BE* 1958, no.295). Some 30 miles east of Antioch, there was a village with the name 'Maroneia', which may be Greek; but, at any rate in the fourth century AD, a person from there would speak Syriac (Jerome, *V. Malchi* 2). Similarly, 20 kilometres north of Laodicea there was a place called 'Heraclea Thalasse' (*IGLS* IV, 1252, of 108/7 BC; cf. Pliny, *NH* 5.79). If there was any area where Greek settlement may have produced significant direct effects on property-relations and 'modes of production', it will have been in the territories surrounding the new cities of the north Syrian tetrapolis.

Elsewhere concrete evidence for new city foundations of the earlier hellenistic period is remarkably sparse. There were none along the Phoenician coast or in Idumaea or Judaea. Late sources record that a Macedonian settlement was established by Alexander or Perdiccas on the site of Samaria (Schürer 1979, 160). In this case there is substantial archaeological evidence which can be brought into relation with this settlement. The round towers added to the existing wall of the acropolis are dated to the late fourth century; an outer circuit of walls, with square towers, perhaps belongs to the second century BC (Crowfoot 1942, 24–31). It seems certain that this small fortified town on a hill-top is that of the Macedonian settlers and their descendants, to be distinguished from the Samaritans proper, who in the later fourth century had established their own temple on Mount Gerizim (Schürer 1979, 161; see further below p. 124).

The cults followed by the settlers are illustrated (if no more than that) by a finely-cut inscription of the third century BC from Samaria with a dedication by Hegesander, Xenarchis and their children to Sarapis and Isis (Crowfoot et al. 1957, 37, no. 13; illustrated in Avi-Yonah 1972, 37). But in many places we cannot be *certain* what social changes are implied by the appearance of cities with Macedonian place-names, like Beroea, Cyrrhus or Gindarus in the north-east, or Pella or Dium in Jordan (for toponyms in Syria see the illuminating survey by Frézouls 1978). Excavations at Pella have now revealed some evidence of the earlier hellenistic period (Smith 1982). But

Cyrrhus, for example, makes no appearance at all in our sources until 6,000 'Cyrrhestian' soldiers are recorded as mutinying against Antiochus III in 220 (Polyb. 5.50.7–8; 57.4; see Frézouls 1954/5; 1977). It is reasonable to believe that it was a Macedonian settlement of the early period, like Dura-Europus on the Euphrates. But again, very little is known of the social character of hellenistic Dura except the vital item that some at least of the land there was classified as *klêroi* (*P. Dura* 15, second century BC). As a physical structure it was, like Samaria, a fortified site of moderate extent (the three longer sides measuring just under 1,000 metres each), sited on a plateau above the Euphrates, and equipped with walls. Internally, it was set out in regular blocks on the well-known Hippodamian plan, with a central agora. It is uncertain which, if any, temples can be attributed to the initial hellenistic phase. No evidence for a theatre or other public buildings of this period has been found (Perkins 1973, 10–16). It is natural to presume that we should envisage both Samaria and Dura as Macedonian military settlements, placed for strategic purposes in alien landscapes, and with modest pretensions to being the bearers of a wider Greek culture. In the case of many other foundations there is still less evidence. Beroea (Aleppo) is recorded as a foundation of Seleucus I (Appian, *Syr.* 57). Once again we have nothing to show whether the ancient city of Aleppo still existed at the moment of the settlement; but the street plan to this day reflects the rectangular axes which may well be those of the colony (Sauvaget 1941, 40).

The same problems persist if we look at places which subsequently gained hellenistic dynastic names: Philadelphia (Amman) and Ptolemais (Acco) from Ptolemy Philadelphus (near here Strabo 16.2.27 (758), notes three place-names which may reflect Ptolemaic rule: 'Sykaminôn polis', 'Boukolôn polis' and 'Krokodeilôn polis'). Epiphaneia (Hama) presumably gained its name from Antiochus IV Epiphanes. This was of course another ancient city, which, as Josephus records, the *epichôrioi* still called 'Hama' (*Ant.* 1.138). But, paradoxically, excavations on the site have seemed to suggest that it was unoccupied between its destruction by Sargon II in 720 and the beginning of Greek settlement in the second century BC (so Fugman 1958, 269). On the other hand, Sargon is recorded to have settled 6,300 Assyrians there, and there continue to be occasional mentions of Hama as a place in documents of the intervening period (ibid., 264); the archaeological evidence should not be interpreted on the *assumption* that the site was desolate after 720 (see now esp. Francis, Vickers 1985), and imported hellenistic pottery appears there before the reign of Antiochus IV (Christensen, Johansen 1971, 1). The evidence for continuity of settlement is therefore ambivalent; and while the evidence for the hellenistic city remains unpublished, it is impossible to say whether it would suggest the implantation of an organised

settlement at a specific moment. But if Epiphaneia did receive an actual settlement of Greeks, there was certainly no such settlement in Jerusalem in the 170s, when the population briefly acquired the title 'Antiocheis'. The settlement on the Akra in Jerusalem in the 160s was another matter.

The provable extent of organised Macedonian or Greek settlement is thus limited to one area, north Syria. Other towns which acquired Greek names may well also have received settlements, but some certainly did not. If we consider the entire non-desert area west of the Euphrates, Greek colonial settlement must be regarded as a relatively limited phenomenon, largely restricted in time also, to the reign of Seleucus I. Whatever created the conditions for a large-scale transformation, fusion or conflict, if anything did, it was not, except in north Syria, a massive process of colonisation.

Was there none the less extensive private immigration, either for settlement on the land or for other purposes, such as trading in slaves? Here again we have to say that we do not know. We can easily illustrate, for instance, the presence in Syria of Ptolemaic soldiers from various parts of the Greek world; the inscription from Ras Ibn Hani on the coast 8 kilometres north of Laodicea (Rey-Coquais 1978) which records some of these is the earliest Greek public inscription from north Syria, dating to about the second half of the third century. Excavations on this site have shown that a fortified Greek town, whose name remains unknown, was established there in the same period, probably by the Ptolemies (Leriche 1982). Greeks also entered the service of local dynasts: a papyrus from the Zenon archive shows us soldiers from Cnidus, Caunus, Macedon, Miletus, Athens and Aspendus serving in 159 under Tobias in Ammonitis (*PCZ* 59003 = *CPJ* I, 1). In the second century we come across a Macedonian settled at Abae in Arabia and married to an Arabian wife (D.S. 32.10.2), or a *politeuma* of Caunians settled in Sidon (*OGIS* 592). No doubt we could accumulate further illustrations; but it would hardly be significant, since it would be more than surprising if there had been *no* Greek private settlement in this region. But it does have to be emphasised that there is no positive evidence to suggest that there was private immigration on a scale which would by itself have brought profound changes in culture, social relations or the economy.

If we go back to the major cities of the Syrian tetrapolis, there is certainly adequate evidence to illustrate their character as Greek cities in the hellenistic period. It should be stressed that in the absence of large-scale documentary evidence we still depend quite significantly on passing items of narrative material, like the papyrus report (the Gurob papyrus), from the Ptolemaic side, of Ptolemy III's invasion of Syria in the 240s. It records the priests, *archontes* and the other citizens of Seleucia, with the *hêgemones* (officers of the Seleucid garrison) and soldiers, coming down to greet the invading forces. A similar scene is said to have followed at Antioch, with a ceremonial greeting before the city by 'satraps and other *hêgemones*, and soldiers and *synarchiai* and all the *neaniskoi* from the gymnasium', and the rest of the population, bearing cult images (*FGrHist*. 160; Austin 1981 no. 220). Seleucia does not reappear in our evidence until we come to Polybius Book 5, and the narrative of its recapture by Antiochus III in 219; it turns out to be a place of modest size, with some 6,000 'free men' (which may mean citizens only, or all non-slave male inhabitants); perhaps therefore some 30,000 persons in all (5.61.1). These cities produce nothing like the vast harvest of monumental Greek inscriptions which characterise (say) Delphi, Delos or some of the Greek cities of western Asia Minor in this period. It is true that at both Antioch, Seleucia and Laodicea subsequent occupation greatly limits the possibilities of excavation; for the scanty evidence on early hellenistic Laodicea see Stucky 1983, 173f. But it should still not be assumed that the social conditions which elsewhere led to the large production of public inscriptions necessarily applied in Syria in the same way. Public inscriptions from Seleucia in Pieria do reveal, for instance, the vote of a statue for the Seleucid *epistatês* of the city in 186 BC (Welles 1934 no. 45 = *IGLS* III.1, 1184); or a letter of Antiochus VIII or IX, of 109 BC, confirming the freedom of the city (*OGIS* 257 = Welles 1934 nos. 71/2). There is no substantial corpus of the public inscriptions of Seleucia; excavation of the relevant public buildings, when identified, might of course reveal them. From Laodicea the only known public decision recorded on stone from the hellenistic period is the *gnômê* (proposal) of Asclepiades and the *archontes*, approved by the *peliganes* (the councillors, a Macedonian word) in 174 BC (*IGLS* IV, 1261), concerning the sanctuary of Isis and Sarapis. From Antioch and Apamea there are no public decrees at all surviving from the hellenistic period; though one inscription from Antioch shows *theôroi* (sacred delegates) honouring an *agonothêtês* from Seleucia in 198/7 BC (Kraeling 1964; *BE* 1965, 436); and one from Daphne shows Antiochus III appointing a priest there (Welles 1934 no. 44). Passing literary references indicate at least the existence of gymnasia at Laodicea (Appian *Syr*. 46) and at Daphne near Antioch (Polyb. 30.26.1), and e.g. of a hippodrome near Seleucia (Polyb. 5.47.1). Poseidonius' remarks on the luxury of life in Syria (*Ath*. 210e–f = 527e–f) imply that gymnasia were common. None of these cities, however, has revealed any trace of a *theatre* that can be firmly dated to this period. It is surely, I think, a revealing fact that there is no certain archaeological evidence for a theatre of the hellenistic period anywhere in the Syrian region. Given the relative indestructability of theatres built against hillsides, as hellenistic theatres normally were (e.g. those of Priene or Delos), this

is one case where negative evidence may be suggestive (so Frézouls 1959; but see Colledge, below p. 151).

Outside the places which we know to have been royal foundations, or to have acquired Greek names, we do have some evidence, from various periods, of the spread of a recognisably Greek way of life. A site called Ayin Dara, north-east of Aleppo, for instance, shows traces of occupation in the Persian period and then a substantial urban area with walls from the hellenistic period, with pottery and coins of the second and first centuries BC (Seirafi, Kirichian 1965). This site, whose Greek name, if it had one, is unknown, is a reminder of just how much of the evidence of hellenistic Syria may simply be lost. For contrast we have Tel Anafa in northern Galilee, whose heated bath house of the later second century BC is the earliest known from the Near East (Herbert 1981); and the well-known site of Marisa in Idumaea, a small urban settlement of six acres, built in the third or early second centuries BC, and enclosed by a fortification wall. Greek was in use there, as shown by some execration texts in Greek, and the inscriptions on the well-known painted tombs. But the house-types are non-Greek and at least some of the inhabitants identified themselves in Greek as 'Sidonians in Marisa' (*OGIS* 593; Horowitz 1980). The mixed culture of this area in the third century BC is now vividly illustrated by a group of ostraca from Khirbet el-Kôm, four in Aramaic, one in Greek and one Greek-Aramaic bilingual; the latter records the borrowing of 32 *zuzn* by Niceratus from one Qus-yada'/Kosides (cf. above p. 112), described (in both texts) by the Greek word *kapêlos*, 'trader' (Geraty 1975). This text, probably of 277 BC, thus reveals the *kapêlos* as a loan-word in a dialect of Aramaic. These ostraca are closely paralleled by an Aramaic ostracon of the third century from Jerusalem, also containing what seem to be two Greek loan-words (Cross 1981).

The ostracon is given the date 277 on the supposition that the 'sixth year' referred to in it is that of Ptolemy Philadelphus. Most of the evidence which illustrates Greek economic activity in Syria comes from the Ptolemaic phase of control. All we have is fragments, occasionally illuminating. Some cities, as we saw, gained dynastic names, Akko becoming 'Ptolemais', and Rabbat-Amman 'Philadelphia'. Scythopolis and Philoteria in Galilee must also have gained their Greek names in the Ptolemaic period. Our main evidence comes from the Zenon papyri, discussed by Tcherikover (1937). These papyri of course owe their survival to the particular conditions of Egypt, and thus cast a side-light on Syria somewhat comparable to that shed by the Aramaic documents from Egypt of the Achaemenid period (above p. 111). But while the relevant climatic and soil conditions, allowing the survival of perishable writing materials, very rarely apply in the

Near East, they are not wholly unknown, as the documents from Qumran and the Wadi Dâliyeh show.

The first thing that the Zenon papyri clearly illustrate is the slave trade. Among the immigrant Greek *klêrouchoi* serving at Birtha in Ammanitis under Tobias, mentioned earlier (*PCZ* 59003 = *CPJ* I, 1), one sells a slave-girl named Sphragis, apparently from Babylon or Sidon, to another, who then sells her to Zenon. In Marisa Zenon also bought some slaves (*sômata*), two of whom escaped and had to be searched for (59015). One Menecles appears as having transported some slaves (*sômata*) and other merchandise (*phorta*) from Gaza to Tyre, and as intending to tranship them without paying the export tax or having an export-permit (*exagogê tôn sômatôn*) (59093). Tobias also sends to Apollonius a group of four slaves as a gift, two described as circumcised and two not (59076 = *CPJ* I, 5). There is no obvious reason in the text for regarding either of the circumcised men as Jewish; if they were not, then this is evidence for the continuation of the custom of circumcision among the Syrians generally in the hellenistic period.

Much more informative for the continuity of a non-Greek culture is a papyrus letter of 156 BC from Egypt (*PZenon* no. 121; see Vaggi 1937) mentioning a slave who was 'by race a Syrian from Bambyce' who was 'tattooed on the right wrist with two barbarian letters'. The letters can only have been Aramaic ones; Bambyce is Hierapolis, an important centre of a non-Greek culture, on which see further below. Lucian, *On the Syrian Goddess*, written in the second century AD, which is about the goddess Astarte of Hierapolis, records (59) that the Syrian adherents of the cult were tattooed on the neck or wrist – 'and thence all *Assyrioi* bear tattoos'.

To come back to the economic impact of Greek rule, slavery and the slave trade was clearly a feature of it; but whether this was a *novelty* remains unclear. The most striking reflection of slavery in hellenistic Syria remains the well-known edict of Ptolemy II Philadelphus dating to April 260, which surely can be taken to illustrate a causal connection between foreign domination and slavery (Lenger 1980 no. 22; Austin 1981 no. 275): 'If any of those in Syria or Phoenicia have bought a *sôma laikon eleutheron* ('free native')', or have acquired one in any other way, they are required to prove that they were slaves at the time of acquisition. Those bought at royal auctions, however, are legally owned even if they claim to be free. Moreover soldiers or others who are settled (*katoikountôn*) who are living with *gunaikes laikai* ('native wives') need not declare them as slaves. In the future it will be forbidden to acquire possession of *sômata laika eleuthera* except those sold up by the superintendent of the revenues of Syria and Phoenicia. Whatever the legal definitions involved, the order clearly reflects a notion of the particular liability of the free 'native' popu-

lation of south Syria to slavery; in particular it is significant that the document has to make clear that the 'native' wives of Ptolemaic soldiers and settlers do *not* have to be categorised as slaves. Strikingly, in this case, the king is taking steps to limit the circumstances under which individuals found themselves regarded as slaves.

As was hinted earlier, any notions of what social, economic, cultural or social status is implied by the expression *sômata laika eleuthera* must remain hypothetical. Even if we disregard acute regional variations (see below) it is no use pretending that we have any idea of the typical forms of property-relations in the Syrian area either before or after Alexander's conquest. We can of course see *examples* of various different things, for instance the exploitation of private landed property in the Ptolemaic period in Palestine, perfectly exemplified in a papyrus from the Zenon archive (*P. Lond.* 1948) of 257 BC. An agent, Glaucias, is writing to Apollonius about his enormous vineyard at Bethaneth, which was somewhere in Galilee:

> On arrival at Bethaneth I took Melas with me and inspected the plants and everything else. The estate seems to me to be satisfactorily cultivated, and he said the vines numbered 80,000. He has also constructed a well, and satisfactory living quarters. He gave me a taste of the wine, and I was unable to distinguish whether it was Chian or local. So your affairs are prospering and fortune is favouring you all along the line.

This does on the face of it seem to be an example of the deliberate increase of productive capacity of a sort which, for Ptolemaic Egypt generally, Alan Samuel (1983) has recently sought to deny. There is, however, no indication of how the estate was worked, whether by slave labour, free hired labour or dependent villagers. The question of dependent, but non-slave, agricultural labour in the hellenistic world has attracted an enormous amount of attention. But the evidence comes almost entirely from Seleucid land-grants or sales in Asia Minor; moreover the real social and economic relations alluded to in these inscriptions remain extremely obscure (Welles 1934 nos. 10–13; 18–20; 62; cf. Briant 1982f). It is also from Asia Minor, and entirely from Strabo's *Geography*, that we have almost all the available descriptions of large communities of *hierodouloi* attached to temples (Welwei 1979; Debord 1982, 76f). Comparable evidence is hardly available from Syria. There are I think, just three items. First the mutilated inscription from Hephzibah near Scythopolis (Bethshean) first published by Landau 1966 and re-edited by Fischer 1979 (cf. Bertrand 1982). The dossier contains petitions to Antiochus III from Ptolemaeus, described as *stratêgos* and *archiereus*, and the king's replies, concerning properties owned by Ptolemaeus. The context is immediately after the Seleucid conquest in 200. All that is clear is that the dossier speaks of *kômai* 'of' Ptolemaeus, and that as

owner he is concerned to protect the people (*laoi*) in his villages from official exactions and the quartering of troops (*epistathmeia*). One phrase may imply that some *kômai* had been inherited by him, and others added by the king's command. We can accept that the document embodies the notion of owning villages and (in some sense) of owning or being responsible for the people who inhabit them.

Further north, from the hills inland from Aradus, we have the famous inscription of the temple of Baetocaece (*IGLS* VII, 4028; Austin 1981 no. 178). In response to a report about the *energeia* of the god Zeus of Baetocaece, King Antiochus – which one is uncertain (Seyrig 1951; Rigsby 1980; Baroni 1984) – announces his decision to grant to the god the village of Baetocaece, which a certain Demetrius formerly 'had' (*eschen*), so that its revenue (*prosodos*) may be spent on the sacrifice, and any other steps taken for the improvement of the shrine by the priest appointed by the god. There is to be a monthly tax-free fair, the sanctuary is to be *asulon*, and the village is on no account to be subject to billetting.

It is clear that the cult of Zeus of Baetocaece already existed. The village had, up to the moment of the king's grant of it to the temple, been in private possession. This may mean no more than that there had previously been a (revocable) grant of it to a private person by an earlier king; that is to say that the village belonged in the category of *chôra basilikê*, royal land (so most recently Baroni 1984). No such legal prescription is actually stated in the document, and it is clear from the king's decision that some representation had been made to him about the 'power' (*energeia*) of the god. It is, therefore, equally possible that he is approving the transfer to the sanctuary of land which had previously been in full private ownership. Exactly what is meant for the status of the inhabitants is uncertain. In inscribing this document in the 250s AD, and also a little earlier, in the 220s (*IGLS* VII 4031), they describe themselves as *katochoi* of the god.

The city of Aradus is not involved in this initial transaction, though it was later, under Augustus. Are we then dealing with royal land (*chôra basilikê*) either in the sense of an individual royal property, or in the wider sense, commonly imagined in modern books, that *all* the land outside city territories was 'royal', i.e. in some sense owned and exploited by the king, and at his disposition? In my view this notion goes far beyond what our evidence shows. As what is said below will illustrate, it is very questionable whether this concept has any reflection in the real-life social and economic relations which our sources attest. There were many non-city areas where no direct control was, or could be, exercised by any king.

Where we do find land in royal possession, and then being assigned for cult purposes, is in the remarkable documents from Commagene in which Antiochus I (*c.* 69/38 BC) proclaims his institution of a cult

for various gods, for his deceased father, Mithridates Callinicus, and for himself (Waldmann 1973; Wagner and Petzl 1976). Among the other provisions he states that he has dedicated a group of *mousikoi* who are to learn the arts necessary for performing at the cult-festivals, and to be succeeded in the same skills by their sons, daughters and all their descendants. They are described as *hierodouloi*, and are to maintain this hereditary role for ever. It is not clear, however, whether these are or are not the same as the inhabitants of the *kômai* which, in the Nemrud Dagh text, he says he had dedicated to the gods, or (in the text from Arsamea-Nymphaius) of the land *ek basilikês ktêseôs* ('from that in royal possession') which he has dedicated with its revenues, to be looked after by the priests. But at least we confront here an unambiguous reference to specific royal properties, and also, once again, a category of non-free persons (*hierodouloi*) which does not descend from a remote past, but is being created in the first century BC.

Not far away, and at about the same time, Cicero fought his miserable little campaign against the 'free Cilicians' of the Amanus, whose town, Pindenissum, was high up, well-fortified and inhabited by people who had never yielded obedience to the (Seleucid) kings (*fam.* 15.4.10). It took him a siege of 56 days to capture it. The mountainous or marginal areas of the Syrian region were covered with fortified villages, whose inhabitants, as far as we can see, were integrated in no system of property-relations imposed from outside, and did not belong in any functional sense to any state. Internally, of course, they had their own systems of social stratification. We see this best in one vivid report which relates to two village communities in Moab in about 160 BC. A people called the 'sons of Jamri' were celebrating the wedding of the daughter of one of the notables (*megistanes*) of Canaan, conducting the bride in a great procession laden with possessions. From the opposite direction the bridegroom with his friends and brothers was on his way to meet the bride, accompanied by musicians playing tambourines, and an armed escort. At that point the scene stops; for Jonathan and Simon Maccabaeus with their followers leap up from ambush, slaughter as many as they can, put the rest to flight and take all their possessions (1 Macc. 9.37–42).

The two books of Maccabees, especially the first, give us the best – and more or less contemporary – picture which we have of social formations and settlement patterns in the southern part of the Syrian region in the second century; they would deserve further investigation, directed to the hints which they provide as to non-Jewish social structures in this period. The Maccabean wars stretched from the cities of the Philistine coast, like Azotus with its temple of the Philistine god, Dagon ('Bethdagon', 1 Macc. 10.83–4), to the fortified villages (*ochuromata*) of Idumaea (2 Macc. 10.15) or Transjordan (1 Macc.

5.6–9). In 1 Macc. 5.26–7 a whole string of places across the Jordan, all of which have retained analogous Arabic names until modern times – 'Bosora', 'Bosor', 'Alema', 'Chaspho', 'Maked', 'Karnaim' – are described as large, fortified *poleis*. These too will have been fortified villages; it is worth noting that the author of 1 Macc. has no notion that *polis* ought to be restricted to self-governing cities formally recognised as such; he uses it for instance of Modein (2.15), the village from which the Maccabees came (but see van der Spek, above p. 58). Similarly, Polybius uses the word *polis* of Atabyrion, a settlement on Mount Tabor (5.70.7).

The narratives of Maccabees also illustrate the very close geographical conjunction between different social/economic groupings which characterised this area, since the operations bring the Jewish forces into repeated contact not only with cities and with fortified villages, but with groups described as 'Arabs', following a nomadic, or at any rate non-sedentary, way of life. Even on the coastal strip near Jaffa, Judas Maccabaeus is attacked by not less than 5,000 Arabs with 500 horsemen, described as *nomades*. When defeated, they offer cattle as a pledge of friendship, and retire to their tents (*skênai*; 2 Macc. 12.10–12). The social pattern of an intermingling and mutual dependence, balanced by recurrent hostilities, between various gradations of settled, pastoral and truly nomadic communities using camels, is of course well-known, and nowhere better described than by Donner (1981), on the early Islamic conquests. It is worth noting that Diodorus, concluding his account of the Nabataeans, gives a succinct account of the social relations involved (19.94.10): 'There are also other tribes of Arabs, of whom some even cultivate the soil, intermingled with the tax-paying peoples, and (who) share the customs of the Syrians, except that they dwell in tents'.

I return below to the question of the movement of Arab peoples into Syria and their settlement there, a subject discussed in an interesting way by Dussaud 1955; see also Briant 1982e, ch.3 (an important study) and Shahîd 1984. For the moment note Diodorus' contrast between Arabs living in tents, and those settled populations who can be made to pay taxes. In many parts of the Syrian region, in the mountains and on the fringes of the desert above all, the Seleucid (or Ptolemaic) state either never had, or only occasionally had, any effective presence as the Achaemenids before them who, however, maintained a contractual relationship with them (Briant 1982e, 170ff).

Most of what I have been saying so far has been designed to suggest how limited, variable and erratic the Greek presence in the different parts of the Syrian region was in the hellenistic period, at any rate so far as our present evidence shows. I now wish to look at the other side, and ask what if anything we know of the non-Greek culture of the area, or of essentially non-Greek communities within it. The

Phoenician cities of the coast preserved their historical identity and culture, while evolving, by steps which we cannot really trace, into Greek cities (Millar, 1983). A similar evolution seems to have taken place in the ancient Philistine cities further south, Azotus, Ascalon and Gaza (Rappaport 1970; Schürer 1979, 98–110). As with many other places in the Near East, their non-Greek, or not wholly Greek, identity is expressed most clearly in dedications made on Delos. Perhaps the most striking example is the well-known dedication by a man from Ascalon: 'To Zeus Ourios and Astarte Palestinê, Aphrodite Ourania, the listening gods, Damon son of Demetrios, of Askalon, having been saved from pirates, (offers his) prayer. It is not permitted to introduce (here) a goat, pig or cow' (*ID* no.2305; Bruneau 1970, 346–7). The notion that these, or any other existing communities, could be *made* into Greek cities purely by the issue of some sort of charter or the granting of a Greek constitution, without either a settlement or building operations, still seems to me to need further examination. It is more in accordance with the evidence to see these coastal cities as places which had been in close contact with the Greek world before Alexander, and where, after the conquest, a continued process of hellenisation took place gradually against a background of cultural continuity (see Colledge, below p. 137). But we should not think of the non-Greek elements as being static features of a world in which cultural change came only from the Greek side. For instance, some 9 kilometres from Acco/Ptolemais a Greek inscription of probably the second century BC shows a man with a Greek name dedicating an altar to Hadad and Atargatis, 'the listening gods' (Avi-Yonah 1959). Rather than being an example of the continuity of local non-Greek cults, this inscription is the earliest attestation of these deities on the Phoenician coast.

A much greater problem is presented by those inland cities or communities which are not known to have received any formal Greek colony or settlement. With Jerusalem and Judaea the essential features of cultural and religious contact and conflict are well-known: a significant level of hellenisation, met by a conscious and violent reaction and reassertion of 'national' tradition. The Samaritans too retained and reasserted their 'Israelite' identity. This fact is perfectly illustrated by two dedications of the middle and late second century from Delos in Greek (Bruneau 1982) put up by 'The Israelites on Delos who pay their tithes to holy Argarizein (Mount Gerizim)'.

By contrast, if we think for instance of Damascus, virtually nothing is known of its character as a city or community at the moment of the Macedonian conquest except the bare fact of its existence. Nor has any significant evidence about it through the hellenistic period survived, beyond some coins of the second and first centuries BC with the legend *Damaskênon*, and passing mentions of it as an object of successive

dynastic conflicts (Schürer 1979, 127–30). The occasional documents of persons from Damascus abroad in the hellenistic world are not very informative, though they do illustrate the adoption of Greek nomenclature. It is not surprising that Semitic names might also be retained, for instance 'Martha, Damascênê', on a late second-century inscription from Delos (*ID* nos. 2286–7).

No real insight into the internal life of Damascus can be attained until the middle of the first century, when we come to Nicolaus' account of his father Antipater, who was presumably born around the beginning of the century, and was a skilled orator (in Greek, as is clearly implied), who filled all the offices (*archai*) in the city and represented it before the various dynasts who ruled in the surrounding area (*FGrHist.* 90 F 131). In the chaotic conditions of fluctuating empires and local tyrannies which marked the history of Syria in the middle of the century (see esp. Rey-Coquais 1978) this will have been an essential function. The education and culture to which Nicolaus laid claim (*FGrHist.* 90 F 132) was wholly Greek, and nothing in the extensive fragments of his works suggests any influence from a different historical or cultural tradition. In this he offers an obvious and striking contrast to Josephus, who was to make so much use of him as a source (see esp. Rajak 1983).

A combination of different cultural traditions is certainly expressed in the monuments and inscriptions of one local dynasty which emerged in north Syria in the second century, the royal house of Commagene (for the dynasty see Sullivan 1977; Wagner 1983). But if what we are interested in is a local 'mixed' culture, Commagene is not a true exception, for everything that we can observe there is, first, a royal invention; and secondly, though the kings consciously draw on two traditions, they do so in relation to Greek and *Persian* elements, not Syrian or Aramaic ones: Greek gods and Ahuramazda; royal descent from Persia and Macedon; Persian dress to be worn at festivals (Waldmann 1973). It was natural, in creating a new royal ideology, to look to the two major monarchies of the Achaemenids and the Seleucids. But there is still a contrast, for instance, with the contemporary coinage of the Hasmoneans in Judaea, which incorporates both Greek, Hebrew and Aramaic elements (Schürer 1973, 602f).

So far as I can find, a real continuity is traceable in just one place outside Phoenicia and Judaea, namely Bambyce, also called in Aramaic/Syriac Manbog, and soon to be called in Greek Hierapolis, some miles west of the Euphrates. This is the place from which came the slave in Egypt with his wrist tattooed in 'barbarian letters' (above p. 119). It may be worth putting together what we know of this place, somewhat increased since Goossens' book of 1943. The location of Bambyce, not far from the Euphrates and northern Mesopotamia, may well be significant. Since we know even less of the culture of northern

Mesopotamia in the hellenistic period than we do of the various areas of Syria itself, we can only speculate about how far the two areas shared a common cultural history. But it is at least clear that a remarkable variety of non-Greek influences steadily gained ascendancy, from the first century BC onwards, in the Macedonian colony of Dura-Europos; that Syriac script is first attested, in the very early first century AD, on the Euphrates (Pirenne 1963; Drijvers 1972); and that another Macedonian colony, not far across the Euphrates, Edessa, was to be the focus of Syriac culture (Segal 1970; Drijvers 1977). For the wider cultural contacts around the Fertile Crescent, it is suggestive that Lucian's account of the 'Syrian Goddess' of Hierapolis/ Bambyce records (10) that offerings came there not only from various regions west of the Euphrates but also from Babylonia.

At the time of Alexander's conquest Bambyce was producing coins with Aramaic legends, with the names of ' 'Abdhadad' (meaning 'servant of (the god) Hadad'), or ' 'Abyaty', or (still in Aramaic letters) ' 'Alksandr (Alexandros)'. One has a longer legend ' 'Abdhadad, priest of Manbog, who(?) resembles Hadaran his lord'. (In general see Seyrig 1971b, who recalls the image in Ecclesiasticus 50, of the high priest Simon as he emerged before the people from within the Temple; but, as Seyrig recognises, the reading and interpretation are not certain). The reverse of this same coin shows a priest, presumably 'Abdhadad himself, standing before an altar wearing a long tunic and tall conical hat. Other coins represent Atargatis of Bambyce, the 'Syrian goddess', and one of these has, in Greek, the letters SE, presumably 'Seleukos'. According to Lucian the temple which stood there in his time had been rebuilt by Stratonice, the wife of Seleucus I (*dea Syr.* 17).

In the next century inscriptions of 128/7 BC onwards record men from this place, described as a *polis* with the name Hierapolis (e.g. *ID* no.2226), acting as priests of Hadad and Atargatis at Delos, where a whole range of Syrian cults are represented explicitly in a way which is hardly attested in the hellenistic period in Syria itself (Bruneau 1970, 466f). Probably a little earlier, an inscription from Larisa in Thessaly reveals a man called Antipater, a 'Hierapolitan of Seleucis', described as 'a Chaldaean astronomer', evidently resident over a long period in Thessaly. The description of him as a 'Chaldaean', later repeated by Vitruvius (Bowersock 1983a), would naturally suggest either that Hierapolitans were felt to be in some way associated with Babylonia, or that his astronomical learning was acquired there, or both.

In the first century BC the wealth of the temple was evidently well-known, and in 54 BC Crassus removed treasures from it (Plutarch, *Crassus* 17). Under the Roman empire one of the few inscriptions from the site (*IGLS* I nos.232–52) shows that the place had a *boulê* and *dêmos* in the normal way (no.233). But the most striking of all the

evidence is the relief, in two halves found 50 years apart and joining perfectly, showing a priest in a long tunic, and conical hat surmounted by a crescent (Stucky 1976). A Greek inscription records that this is a statue of Alexander, 'the incomparable high priest', put up by his friend Achaeus, who offered libations and prayed to the gods to preserve his *patris* (homeland) in *eunomia* (good order). The statue dates to the second century AD, the time when Lucian describes the cult of the goddess and lists the vestments of the various priests – the others in white robes and pointed hats, the high priest in purple robes and a tiara (which is visible in the relief, round the bottom of his tall hat). In this case there is enough evidence to show a non-Greek cult which was already in existence before the hellenistic period, and continued in a closely similar form into the Roman empire. Very early on in the hellenistic period it seems to have gained royal patronage; in the next century its cult is on show in Delos; under the Roman empire it is a curiosity and tourist attraction, and a suitable subject for Lucian's parody of Herodotus.

Outside Phoenicia and Judaea there is nowhere else in Seleucid Syria of which we can say the same. Those few non-Greek, or mixed Greek and non-Greek, cultures which our evidence at present does allow us to observe either came from outside the area of Seleucid control or are creations of the very late hellenistic and the Roman period, or both. By contrast with the dearth of Aramaic inscriptions of the Achaemenid, hellenistic and Roman periods from Syria, inscriptions in the various pre-Islamic Arabic scripts are known in large numbers and cover a considerable range in space and time (Roschinski 1980; Teixidor 1981). First, Thamudic inscriptions begin in north-west Arabia around 400 BC and continue until the third or fourth century AD. The sub-category of them known as 'Safaitic', from the volcanic region called the Safa, south-east of Damascus, was in use from the second century AD to just before the rise of Islam; scattered examples have been found as far away as Dura-Europus and Hama. Secondly the Nabataeans, whom our classical sources regard as Arabs, could already write in 'Syrian letters' when Antigonus made his unsuccessful campaign against them in 312 BC (D.S. 19.96.1). Nabataean inscriptions, of which some 4,000 are known, begin in the first half of the second century BC, and continue until the fourth century AD (Starcky 1966; Bowersock 1983b). The northward spread of the inscriptions mirrors the spread of Nabataean control, which for a period in the first century BC, and possibly again in the first century AD, included Damascus. Thirdly, as regards the parallel case of the Palmyrenes, there is evidence of continuous occupation from the third millennium onwards on the tell where the temple of Bēl stood, and a mud-brick temple may have been constructed there in the early hellenistic period. But a tomb of the mid-second century BC seems to be the earliest

datable hellenistic structure on the site (Seyrig 1970a; Colledge 1976; Fellmann 1970; see Will 1983). In the middle of the first century BC we find both the earliest Palmyrene inscriptions, and the earliest evidence of monumental building (Drijvers 1977). Both of these cases, Nabataea and Palmyra, are unquestionably to be regarded as the sedentarisation of Arab peoples, and the construction of new urban centres exhibiting highly distinctive local varieties of Greek architecture. Fourthly, a settled population of mixed Greek and non-Greek culture, with buildings and inscriptions, also emerges in the same period in the Hauran (Djebel Druze), south-east of Damascus. The earliest known monument there is the temple of Balshamen at Si'a, dated by a bilingual Greek/Nabataean inscription to 33–1 BC (Dentzer 1981).

It would be absurd to pretend that we can in any way *explain* these closely parallel developments. All I wish to underline is that we can see the visible manifestations of a number of mixed cultures emerging first outside the areas of Seleucid, or Roman, control, and then spreading inwards. Or so it seems; at Baalbek/Heliopolis, a place which we would naturally think of as distinctively Syrian, there is no certain archaeological evidence from before the early Roman imperial period. Von Gerkan did however argue (1937) that under the major temple of the mid-first century AD there were the foundations of a late hellenistic temple of different design. Emesa, further north up the Orontes valley, was also of course, at least by the second and third centuries, the site of the conspicuously non-Greek cult of Elagabal, whose cult object was an aniconic black stone. The place is not known to have existed until the first century BC, when there appeared the local dynasty of Sampsigeramus and his son Iamblichus (Sullivan 1977), the 'tribal leaders' (*phylarchoi*) of the *ethnos* of the Emiseni, as Strabo calls them (16.2.10 (753)), saying that they ruled nearby Arethusa (a settlement of Seleucus I, Appian, *Syr.* 57). These dynasts too were characterised by contemporaries as 'Arabs' (Cicero *fam.* 15, 1, 2: 'Iamblichus, phylarchus Arabum'), and the first part of Sampsigeramus' name is based on the Semitic word *shemesh*, the sun. On Seyrig's view (1971a), the sun-cult in Syria is typically of Arab origin. But, just to confuse our conception of the background, the main cult of Emesa in this period does not itself seem to have been a sun-cult. What seems to be the earliest documentary attestation of the name 'Elagabal' as a divine name offers a new etymology for the word, namely 'god mountain'. This is an inscription in Palmyrene lettering of the first century AD, found some 80 kilometres south-east of Emesa and 100 kilometres south-west of Palmyra, and naming, along with the Arab deity Arṣu, another deity called ' 'Ilh' gbl', that is 'Elaha Gabal' – 'god mountain' – represented as an eagle with outstretched wings standing on a rock (Starky 1975/6). Then, to add a further

confusing element, when we come to Herodian's famous description of the cult of Elagabal (5.3.2–6), he characterises it as 'Phoenician'; just as Heliodorus, the author of the novel *Aethiopica*, calls himself 'a Phoenician from Emesa' (10.41.3).

However we ought to characterise the cultural background out of which the Emesa of Roman imperial times emerged, Seyrig elsewhere (1959) saw its brief prosperity as a city as having been closely linked to the caravan trade of Palmyra. That raises questions which cannot be dealt with here. All I wish to emphasise is that there is nothing to show that Emesa or its cult even existed in the hellenistic period proper. One hypothesis is to see its emergence as a product of the movement of 'Arabs' inwards from the desert fringes, followed by their settlement and creation of a new cult, or at any rate one which was new to that site.

If we move somewhat further north, to Seleucus' foundation at Apamea, here in the Roman empire there was a cult of a non-Greek deity, whom Dio (79.8.5) describes as 'Jupiter called Belos, who is worshipped in Apamea in Syria' and who gave oracular responses. The god Bēl, worshipped also in Palmyra (Teixidor, 1977, 135–40) is first attested in Babylonia. How and when the cult had come to be set up in a Greek city, or to be associated with a cult already there, we do not know (Balty 1977, 129, n.184C; Balty 1981). But in the entire range of our evidence there is probably no more concentrated example of cultural fusion than the brief inscription from Apamea which Rey-Coquais published a decade ago (Rey-Coquais 1973, 67), a Greek dedication by a Roman citizen: 'On the order of the greatest holy god Bēl, Aurelius Belius Philippus, priest and *diadochos* of the Epicureans in Apamea.'

The enigma of hellenistic Syria – of the wider Syrian region in the hellenistic period – remains. None the less, I am tempted to speculate that the positive impact of hellenistic rule was relatively slight. If we think of it in terms of the foundation of wholly new cities, these were not numerous, except in north Syria, and only a few of them are known to have closely resembled what we think of as a fully-fledged Greek city. If we think of an economic or social impact, there were many areas where the Seleucid empire certainly never exercised any direct or effective control (but see above Introduction; Sherwin-White; Salles). What the Seleucid state did was to raise taxes where it could, and to enrol troops either (perhaps) by direct levies among Macedonian *klêrouchoi*, or, more probably, via the Greek cities, like Cyrrhus, via local dynasts like the Hasmoneans, who from time to time supplied contingents, or were supposed to (1 Macc. 10.36; 11.44), or from Arab dynasts like Zabdibelus, who led 10,000 Arabs at the battle of Raphia in 217 (Polybius 5.79.8). The Seleucid state, like most ancient states,

was primarily a system for extracting taxes and forming armies. Much of Syria was disputed territory between the Seleucid and Ptolemaic kingdoms throughout the third century BC. Antiochus IV's final invasion of Egypt in 168 had as an immediate consequence the desecration of the temple in Jerusalem (or so it seemed to one contemporary, Daniel 11.30–1), and the imposition of a Seleucid garrison. A mere six years later, with the escape of Demetrius I from Rome, there began a series of civil wars over the succession to the Seleucid throne which did not end until the occupation of Syria first by Tigranes of Armenia and then by the Romans.

The nature of the Seleucid state, as seen by its subjects, is suggested by the importance of the right of *asylia* as granted to cities (Bickerman 1938, 155), just as it is by Ptolemaeus' concern, immediately after the conquest of southern Syria, to have his villages protected from billetting by the Seleucid army (above pp. 120–1). Some decades later, after the death of Antiochus VII Sidetes while on campaign against the Parthians in 129, his *stratêgos* Athenaeus, when in flight, was refused entry or supplies by the villages which had been 'wronged in connection with the *epistathmeiai*' (D.S. 34/5.17.2).

It is worth suggesting the hypothesis that the remarkable absence of tangible evidence from Syria in the hellenistic period may not be an accident which further discovery would correct, but the reflection of a real absence of development and building activity in an area dominated by war and political instability. Given this absence of evidence, we cannot expect to know much about the culture of Syria in this period, or whether there was, except along the coast, any significant evolution towards the mixed culture which came to be so vividly expressed in the Roman period. The hints which we gain of such a culture are hardly worth mentioning: for instance the fact that Meleager of Gadara, whose epigrams are entirely Greek in spirit, at least knew what words were used as expressions of greeting both in Aramaic and in Phoenician (*Anth. Pal.* 7.419; Gow and Page 1965, 217, no.iv). But there is nothing in the quite extensive corpus of his poetry to show that he had deeply absorbed any non-Greek culture in his native city, although no formal Greek or Macedonian settlement is attested there (Schürer 1979, 132–6). On the contrary, he self-consciously represented his native city as 'Attic Gadara situated among the *Assyrioi*', and says of himself 'If (I am) a Syrian, what is the wonder? My friend, we inhabit a single homeland, the world' (*Anth. Pal.* 7.417; Gow and Page 1965, 216, no.ii). For evidence of non-Greek culture on the part of the inhabitants of inland Syrian cities in the hellenistic period, one can add a passing allusion to the fact that Antonius could find in Antioch in the 30s BC a leading citizen who knew Aramaic, or perhaps Parthian (Plutarch *Ant.* 41).

One of the major problems in the understanding of hellenistic Syria

is thus the relative scarcity of direct and contemporary evidence for any non-Greek culture, or cultures, in the region, either in the Achaemenid or the hellenistic period itself. That might not matter, if we were confident that the evidence available for the Roman imperial period could be used to show cultural continuity, rather than the importation of new elements, from the desert, from Babylonia or from Mesopotamia. The question of chronology may be crucial, and certainly cannot be ignored. To give one central example, in his famous book of 1937, *Der Gott der Makkabäer*, Bickerman argues that we should envisage the pagan cult imposed in 167 BC on the temple in Jerusalem not as Greek but as Syrian. In particular he explains the emphasis which Jewish sources place specifically on the desecration of the altar by the 'abomination of desolation', by the parallel of Arab worship of the altar as a cult object in itself. To reinforce this, he uses the example of an inscription from Jebel Sheikh Barakat near Beroea (Aleppo) with a dedication to Zeus Madbachos, 'Zeus of the Altar'. But there is an acute problem of chronology here: the temple from which this inscription comes did not exist in the second century BC. It was constructed by persons with Greek names between the 50s and the 120s AD; the earliest inscriptions recording its dedication to Zeus Madbachos and Selamanes, 'the ancestral gods', probably date to the 50s AD (*IGLS* II, nos. 465–75, see Callot and Marcillet-Jaubert 1984).

The ancestors of these people may indeed have worshipped these same deities through the hellenistic period. The god Shulman/Selamanes is in fact attested in Syria long before that. But nobody, so far as we know, put up a temple for these gods on this site, or composed a dedicatory inscription for them until the first century AD. The problem therefore remains. Whatever the society, economy and culture of the Syrian region was like in the hellenistic period, the 'hellenistic' Syria, with a distinctive mixed culture, which our evidence allows us to encounter is that which evolved under the Roman empire (see esp. Teixidor 1977, for the popular religion attested in the inscriptions of this period).

That is, however, in the first instance, a fact about our evidence. It is not presented here as a definite conclusion about the 'real' world of the Syrian region in the hellenistic period, but as a strategic device whose purpose is precisely to bring into sharper relief significant new items of evidence as they appear. First, to insist on the sparseness of evidence for the culture and social structure of the region in the Achaemenid period, with the possible exception of Judaea, and to a lesser extent Phoenicia, is to prevent the unconscious projection of general notions about 'oriental' or 'Near Eastern' civilisation on to this area. Secondly, to emphasise the limits of the empirical data which we can actually use to give substance to the notion of 'hellenisation' or 'hellenism' in this particular time and place is both to call

these concepts into question and to insist on testing them, so far as possible, area by area and period by period. Thirdly, the notion of a 'fusion' of cultures is doubly open to question if we have very little direct evidence for the nature of either of the cultures concerned, let alone for the manner in which they may have interacted, or occupied separate spheres. 'Hellenisation' might, as is often supposed, have extended very little outside the towns or the upper classes. Yet as regards towns, or urban centres, there is enough evidence to suggest that it was possible to absorb Greek culture without losing local traditions; and that Hierapolitans, Phoenicians and Samaritans when abroad positively emphasised their non-Greek identity.

Nor, by contrast, is it certain that country areas remote from the centres of Greek or Macedonian settlement remained immune to Greek presence or influence. This paper concludes with what seems to be (so far) the only formal bilingual inscription, in Greek and Aramaic, dating to the hellenistic period, and discovered west of the Euphrates. This is a dedication from Tel Dan, first published in a brief archaeological report (Biran 1977) and discussed by Horsley (1981, no.67) in one of his valuable surveys of new material relevant to early Christianity. The site seems to have been a high place of the Israelite period (tenth-ninth centuries BC), on which further construction, possibly including an altar, subsequently took place in the hellenistic period. The inscription, carved on a limestone slab, seems to date to the late third or early second century BC (*BE* 1977, no.542). The Greek text, quite finely carved, presents no problems: 'To the god who is in Dan Zoilos (offers) his vow' (*thêoi/tôi en Danois/Zôilos euchên*). Immediately underneath it comes an Aramaic text, more amateurishly carved, of which just enough survives to show that the author, and hence the date, is the same. It reads either [BD]Ṇ NDR ZYLS L' [LH'] – 'In [Da]n, vows of ZYLS (Zoilos) to the god', or (more probably) [H]Ṇ NDR ZYLS L' [LH' DN] – '[This] (is the) vow (of) Zoilos to the [god in Dan].'

On either interpretation this modest document is of immense significance for the cultural and religious history of the Syrian region. First, it is one of the earliest formal Greek inscriptions from the whole area. Secondly, it is both the only formal Aramaic (as opposed to Phoenician) inscription and the only formal Greek-Semitic bilingual inscription (as opposed to ostraca) from the Syrian region in the hellenistic age. Thirdly, the archaeological evidence clearly suggests the continuation, or at least the resumption, of worship at an ancient cult-site. Fourthly, the site itself occupies an inland location, near the headwaters of the Jordan, separated from the coast by some 40 kilometres of hill-country, and some 50 kilometres away from the nearest Greek, or semi-Greek, cities, Damascus and Gadara. There is no way of knowing whether Zoilos was an immigrant Greek who had either acquired some knowledge of Aramaic, or at least knew the necessity

of having his vow recorded also in Aramaic; or whether he was a person of Syrian origin who had learned Greek, and adopted the Greek custom of the dedicatory inscription, and paired it with an inscription of a less well-established type, in his native Aramaic. In either case a rustic cult-centre saw worship directed to its nameless deity, and recorded in a fine Greek inscription. Here at last we have a precise example, from the earlier hellenistic period, of the meeting of two identifiable cultures.